

Centrepiece - with a swan-shaped cover

Metalwork Collection

Accession Nr.: E 65.86.1-2 

Date of production: mid 17th century

Place of production: Germany

Materials: flame-gilt silver; garnet jasper; peridot; smoky quartz; turquoise

Techniques: chased; chiselled; enamel decoration; engraved decoration

Dimensions:
height: 27,4 cm
height: 15,5 cm
base diameter: 8,8 x 6,9 cm
height: 12, 3 cm
diameter: 12 x 7,5 cm

This ornamental vessel has a base and superstructure richly decorated with enamel and gemstones, a polished jasper cup that resembles a scallop shell or a segmented fruit, and an enamelled, gem-studded lid in the shape of a crowned swan. The base of the foot is an ovoid, embossed metal plate with a light blue enamel ground, which holds, in a mount, a scallop-shaped piece of jasper. The light blue ground around the latter bears slightly plastic leaves and flowers, created by patches of white, yellow, blue and reddish enamel, and turquoise, garnet and chrysolite stones in mounts. The joint of the ribbed jasper stem and the foot is concealed by a hoop decorated with turquoise and garnet. The C-shaped and hidden curved supports that rise from the gilded, ring-shaped end cap of the stem hold enamelled leafy appliqués, before merging in another ring at the base of the jasper cup.

The colourful foliage of this very uniquely designed node has an enamel and gem decoration that echoes that of the base plate, but in an intensified form. Inside the node, a jasper ball in an enamelled mount hangs from the top ring, which also holds the cup. The embossed base plate of the swan lid extends beyond the rim of the cup. Its light blue enamel ground bears protuberances in different colours and gems, in the manner of the foot, with the addition of a large, faceted piece of smoky quartz in the centre. The swan's neck, wings and tail are enamelled white and are mounted on the base plate. With the exception of the openwork, fully enamelled tail, which imitates feathers, the other parts of the bird's body are decorated, on both sides, with mounted turquoise and garnet stones. The yellow-beaked swan bears a meticulously executed crown on its head, whose white enamel ground bears patches of blue and red enamel, while the small blue ball hanging from the crown is marked with white, red and black patches. The crown is attached to the head, ingeniously, with the strip of metal that forms the bird's tongue.

Although it could be looked upon as a lidded goblet or as a decorative vessel, this unusual-looking ornament can hardly be considered a functional object. Its value at the time lay essentially in its originality. The princely and aristocratic owners of the *Kunst- und Wunderkammern* (cabinets of curiosities), which had their roots in the Renaissance but emerged during the Mannerist period, kept a large number of similarly special ornaments, so-called *artificialia*. Along with the outstanding artistic achievement and virtuoso technical execution that marked them, these objects often owed their uniqueness or value to their astonishing design (form and use of materials). Such ornaments were accordingly considered particularly precious rarities, and would proclaim the greatness (*magnificentia*) and wealth of their owner. As a result, their popularity continued unabated into the Baroque era. As a centrepiece, it served to amaze and dazzle guests.

It is not known when and how this piece was acquired by the Esterházy, or whether they had commissioned it. The 1725 inventory of the Esterházy's Treasury at Fraknó reads: *In a tall red gilded case, a lidded, gilded goblet of jasper, with some turquoises and precious stones in silver mounts, with a swan on top, decorated with many beautiful enamels.*

In the light of the damages that the Esterházy's Treasury suffered during the Second World War, this object is also

special in that its original leather case has also survived.

Literature

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